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E. German Spy Suspect Allowed to Leave Bonn

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BONN—A West German federal prosecutor Monday dropped charges against a suspected spy, reviving a potentially damaging confrontation with East Germany.

Federal prosecutor Kurt Rehmann said he withdrew the arrest order against East German economist Herbert Meissner, the deputy chairman of the East German Academy of Sciences, because it was "in the national interest" to do so.

Meissner, 59, was then driven from the East German mission in Bonn, where he had taken refuge, to see the West German minister of inner-German affairs, Ludwig Rehlinger. Rehlinger later told a news conference that Meissner said he wished to return to East Germany, and he was taken back to the border.

Negotiator in Spy Swaps

Meissner was accompanied by Wolfgang Vogel, an East German lawyer who has figured as a negotiator in many of the major spy exchanges between the East and West. Over the weekend, Vogel met with Rehlinger, and it is believed that the arrangement to let Meissner go was worked out then.

The prosecutor's action brought to an end a diplomatic row that began July 9, when Meissner, who was allowed by the East German government to visit West Berlin, was arrested there for shoplifting. Sources in Bonn said Meissner insisted on seeing West German intelligence authorities after his arrest and told them then that he wished to defect.

The West Germans flew him to Munich for interrogation by the federal intelligence agency. Somehow, Meissner then left Munich and turned up in Bonn at the East German mission here.

Refuses to Explain

Rehlinger said Monday that when he spoke to Meissner, he asked him how he managed to get from Munich to Bonn, but the economist would not tell him.

East Germany has insisted, however, that Meissner was kidnaped in West Berlin, drugged and spirited to Munich against his will. There, East German sources said, Meissner was forced to sign a document saying he had voluntarily defected to the West.

The East German government demanded Meissner's immediate return, warning that relations between the two Germanys would suffer severely if he were not.

Explaining the dropping of the charges Monday, the prosecutor's office said that West German law allows legal proceedings to be canceled when national interests are at stake.